

*Grand Guignol: The Theatre of Horror, the Efficacy of Horrific Staging, and
When My Body Cried Out*

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Thank you Mom and Dad, for dressing up as scary things when I was little. I'm sure that had no effect on me as an adult. Thank you for reminding me that without the terrible things in the world, we couldn't appreciate the blessed things.

Abstract

Grand Guignol is a French genre of theatre that exploited the very strong and real human experience of intense fear in order to create impactful pieces of drama that, though fleeting, affected people deeply and sparked the flame of modern concepts of gore, shock, and thrill. The genre originated in *Le Théâtre du Grand-Guignol*, founded by Oscar Méténier in Paris during the late 19th century. The theatre staged gruesome naturalistic plays until its close in 1962, during which time audience members experienced shocking scenes of gore and violence. Today, because of the realistic nature of film and TV, theatrical horror can appear cheap and melodramatic.

When My Body Cried Out is an original one-act play written as an exploration of the *Guignol* genre in an effort to inspire a reinvigoration of its effective horror aesthetics. This play is an investigative endeavor towards applying surviving *Guignol* aesthetics in modern theatre and film to new, compelling, and believable theatrical horror. Richard Hand and Michael Wilson's book *Grand-Guignol: The French Theatre of Horror* was a key component to identifying these aesthetics; this text is one of the most comprehensive and widely-referenced pieces of literature on *Grand Guignol* and includes short, translated *Grand Guignol* plays. This new one-act play incorporates *Guignol* traditions of uninhibited, visceral shock and gore while also integrating modern horror aesthetics such as psychological terror and thrill. *When My Body Cried Out* is a story about the stigmas of mental illness and the monsters lurking in plain sight.

Keywords: *Grand Guignol*, horror, theatre

Table of Contents

Acknowledgments	i
Abstract	ii
<u>PART I</u>	
Preface: A Critical Analysis of <i>Grand Guignol</i> and its Application in <i>When My Body Cried Out</i>	4
<u>PART II</u>	
<i>When My Body Cried Out</i>	12
Character List	14
Scene One	16
Scene Two	23
Scene Three	25
Scene Four	30
Scene Five	33
Scene Six	44
Scene Seven	48
Scene Eight	52
Scene Nine	55
Works Cited and Referenced	57

Preface:

A Critical Analysis of *Grand Guignol* and its Application in *When My Body Cried Out*

The news and modern media are often criticized for using scare-tactics to garner audience attention and influence viewership. Graphic images of war zones and crime scenes flash across TVs all over the nation and the world, filling homes with a quiet, but intense anxiety about the state of the world. News reported in this way incites fear, one of the most intense and strongest emotional reagents. The experience of fear triggers primal and instinctive human responses; the feeling of a cold sweat, the hair raising on the back of the neck, can overpower logic and reason, even for just a few moments, which can make all the difference when propagating a message. Using horror and accessing fear as a strategy for storytelling is incredibly effective, because of the rich, raw and powerful human emotion of fear. Fear is a huge contributor to the process of decisionmaking--fear is how humans learn self-preservation. That disgusting, twisting feeling at the bottom of your gut while walking alone in the dark, feeling a cold breath against your neck, knowing something is watching you, is the one thing keeping you alive when the shadows close in.

Art seeks to tap into human emotion and reflect the realities of life. Happiness, serenity, and even melancholy are all emotions the average person would readily experience, especially instead of fear. The use of fear and horror in storytelling to some of the oldest recorded traditions, implemented to teach lessons and to incur change: the original Grimm's fairy tales were dark and gruesome, blood-soaked and eerie; in Elizabethan England, public executions were popular, well-attended social events; and the Greeks regularly attended plays such as *Oedipus Rex* and other tragedies that portrayed brutal murders and heinous disfigurement. Today, horror is still actively utilized in film, TV, news, literature, and, in my interests

particularly, theatre. The arts are the avenues through which humans seek to understand the world around them. People generally enjoy good art and like feeling impacted in very binary ways: happy, sad, angry, etc. Installations that engage with fear, however, often leave audiences uncomfortable and generally resentful of the art because of the duality of fear, wherein the fundamental paradox of horrific art lies: people are uncomfortable accessing fear, yet fear is a pleasurable and cathartic experience (Hanich 150).

Eating spicy food is similarly paradoxical. People eat spicy food because they like the flavor, but part of that flavor is the painful, burning sensation. Every aspect in the experience of eating spicy food, from the heat to the stinging on the tongue, would typically warn people not to eat spicy food, yet that pain is simultaneously, somehow, pleasurable. This same pleasure-pain phenomenon applies to experiencing fear. When experiencing fear in a controlled and voluntary environment, people tend to feel release through the rush of adrenaline and endorphins flooding the body as fight or flight is activated and fear takes over (Ellerby 16). Horror theatre is a perfect vehicle for experiencing this intimate and alarming emotional sensation. In theatre, horror has been used as a means of investigating moral codes and as an exhilarating form of catharsis. Plays such as Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus* capitalized on people's natural instinct to observe and take pleasure in seeing brutality and pain inflicted on others, while remaining relatively safe behind the protective "fourth wall," or the imaginary, conventional wall separating the action on stage and the audience (Hanich 151). The audience, as a voyeur, is able to safely experience the horror onstage, the threat of danger, and the thrill of seeing a sick, twisted part of themselves in the drama, without being in any real danger at all, which is why theatrical horror is of particular interest and importance in the history of human storytelling.

Grand Guignol is one of the world's "greatest forgotten theatres," (1) as Richard J. Hand and Michael Wilson write in their book, *Grand-Guignol: The French Theatre of Horror*, one of the very few extensive pieces of literature on the titular genre. *Grand Guignol* was conceived in late 19th century France, where socio-political tensions and a new theatrical renaissance brought forth an experimental and twisted interest in psychological thrill and gore. The genre originated in *Le Théâtre du Grand-Guignol*, founded by Oscar Méténier in Paris, where horrific plays such as *Le Jardin des Supplices*, or *The Torture Garden*, were staged in an incredibly intimate space. The theatre displayed sensational plays depicting gruesome images such as women being skinned alive or men performing self-amputations with axes, until its close in 1962. Understandably, the audience was left absolutely stunned, some reporting loss of consciousness and moral outrage. People vomited in the streets after witnessing these pieces of theatre, and yet it was wildly popular for its well-executed, detailed, and carnal stylings (Hand and Wilson 4). *Grand Guignol* experimented with heightened, almost campy realism to codify and aestheticize a style of revulsion that survives in modern types of cinematic horror and may prove to be a key missing piece in contemporary theatrical horror.

A typical *Grand Guignol* play is short, only twenty to thirty minutes long, and exhibits a few identifiable aesthetic traits. Tanja Jurković, a professor of English and French Language and Literature in Croatia, wrote a popular article through the *Sic Journal* on the aesthetics of *Grand Guignol*, which is incredibly important when considering how the practices and techniques of *Grand Guignol* translate into modern horror. She describes *Guignol* as "erotic" and "titillating" (3), which implies the state of vulnerability and excitement that *Guignol* inspired as a genre that explored horror. To write the original one-act, *When My Body Cried Out*, I focused primarily on incorporating key *Guignol* aesthetics that I found to not only be dramatically captivating, but

also prevalent in critically acclaimed pieces of modern cinematic horror. By incorporating *Guignol* aesthetics such as intensely physical gore, condensed length, detailed stage directions, the juxtaposition between body horror and eroticism, and conversations about mental illness, I was able to successfully isolate some of the more effective *Guignol* aesthetics and compose a piece that hopefully mimics the successful *Guignol* fear tactics and invites them into a twenty-first century context.

Helen Freshwater writes in her book, *Theatre Censorship in Britain: Silencing, Censure and Suppression*, that the graphic nature of *Guignol* pieces caused such an emotional stir, that much of horror theatre was censored to prevent moral outcry (17). These elements of horror-- shock, awe, and general discomfort--are supremely important to reinvigorating the *Guignol* tradition and creating shocking theatre. While *When My Body Cried Out* explores more psychological traumas, it was very important to include scenes of body horror and incorporate opportunities for the director to be able to design huge, bloody climaxes. The stage is fantastically suited for gore, though it is used less and less in contemporary theatre, because of the intimidating disparity between cinematic, heavily edited, and perfectly filmed violence and the sometimes lacking theatrical technology and limitations of the stage. Paula Maxa, in her memoir about her time as one of the most successful *Guignol* actresses in the early twentieth century, wrote that “In the cinema, [. . .] everything happens so quickly. But to see people in the flesh suffering and dying at the slow pace required by live performance, that is much more effective” (Hand and Wilson 6). *When My Body Cried Out* begins with a scene between Gabriel and Carol in which Gabriel is tending to a sensitive, infected, pus-filled wound on Carol’s chest. They talk while he puts a healing salve over her sores, but the grotesqueness is strong and palpable and, which is one of the subtler strengths to the physical horrors in the *Guignol*

tradition. Staging suffering is an incredibly powerful practice, so in order to utilize this *Guignol* aesthetic most effectively, I made specific and clear decisions about what sort of physical ailments--beyond the mental illnesses--affected each character and how those would be staged.

I wanted to make it very clear that Martha, Gabriel's older sister and the primary source of most of the conflict in the play, was neither the villain, nor the antagonist. In Paul Autier's *The Lighthouse Keepers*, a *Guignol* piece written in 1905, Yvon, a young man staffing a lighthouse with his father, deteriorates mentally and physically as a result of being bitten by a rabies-infected dog (Hand and Wilson 110). True to the *Guignol* tradition, Yvon's ailment is primarily physical, but he does not become a monster as the result of his mental failings, rather, his ailment becomes the looming, terrifying force in the play. In the same way, the ineptness of the White family and the general inability to care for mental illness in human history is the main opposing force in *When My Body Cried Out*. I had become tired of the modern horror trope of a mentally ill individual being a monstrous, possessed figure as a cheap excuse for an antagonist and so endeavored to write a story that illustrates a young woman with a beautiful mind, trapped by her surroundings and her conditions and, like a cat backed into a corner, lashes out justifiably. Although Martha's behavior and the manifestations of her illness can be perceived as monstrous and terrifying, she is a victim of her illness and of the cruelty of the people around her. In the eighth scene of the play, the gory apex, Martha has a hallucination of shredding her chest apart, tearing through skin and sinew to claw the angels out from inside of her. She inflicts this damage on herself and, as evidenced by her normalcy in the very next scene, no one is able to see these very real, very painful destructive forces at work in her life, wherein lies her visceral, tangible suffering.

The most difficult part of writing this play was accessing the *Guignol* aesthetic of marrying eroticism and gore. In many *Guignol* plays, horrible things happen during supposedly sexual moments, which plays on the perverse and corrupt pleasure-pain phenomena of interweaving grotesque acts with arousal and intimacy. During the height of *Guignol*, audience members reported an unusual sexual arousal during the horrific shows, accessing an even more carnal part of the human psyche than fear: sadism (Hand and Wilson 73). During the eighth scene of *When My Body Cried Out*, while Martha is wracked with pain and suffering--while she tears her chest apart in her mind under the pressure of all of the horrible evils done against her finally coming to a horrific climax, in the Kitchen, Gabriel and Carol make love. It is a twisted, uncomfortable sight to see such different acts happening alongside each other, but it is an exploration of sexual guilt, in some forms of sadomasochism, and the moral implications of sexual acts, especially those of a violent nature. It was also of particular interest to not only present the reality that, historically, mental illness treatment involved sexual violence, but that it could leave long lasting psychological trauma, especially on the patients, and could lead to horrors equally as shocking as the blood and guts

By writing *When My Body Cried Out* in the spirit of *Grand Guignol*, I am hoping to prove the effectiveness of the *Guignol* genre and encourage its reemergence in horrific theatre. *Guignol* is a relatively modern phenomenon that has loosely been preserved in small droves; the *Guignol* process of execution of interesting, compelling gore still pervades, though the genre itself has faded into relative obscurity. Doctor Markus Wessendorf, a professor at the University of Hawaii at Manoa, relates the popular use of zombies in western entertainment to the naturalist roots of *Grand Guignol*, saying that, “because [the concept] in productions such as *The Walking Dead* is such that humankind is essentially dead, the connection to *Grand Guignol* is not far.”

Throughout the world, there are small enclaves still dedicated to creating horrific and jarring theatrical experiences. The Thrillpeddlers, based out of San Francisco, are a theatrical group that annually stages both classical *Guignol* pieces and contemporary plays based in the *Guignol* tradition. The Thrillpeddlers's theatre is especially important in considering the proper way of staging a *Guignol* piece; their smaller theatre creates a more intimate and uncomfortable space. An audience member walking out of their 2014 production of *The Torture Garden* is quoted, saying, "Every second of the show, all I wanted to do was leave my seat. I guess that means they did their job." The success of these troupes are indicative of the success of the genre and, yet, it is lost in popular theatre culture.

Historically, gory and horrific theatre was a way for people to cope with disaster in a controlled environment; experiencing horror in a theatre is safer and more manageable than in the chaos of everyday life. As technology improved to create more realistic effects, audience attention shifted to whatever form of entertainment most believably scared them and, now, that attention is mostly focused on film. While fear-inducing work in the theatre still exists, the modern audience is conditioned to believe technologically enhanced horror through film, rather than what now reads as cheap melodrama on a stage. One of the purest translations of *Grand Guignol* to modern theatre is Stephen Sondheim and Hugh Wheeler's *Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street*. The murder, mystery, and gruesome scenes are quintessential aspects of *Guignol* integrated within thick, rich plots and riveting musical scores, but the show is less scary than it is riveting or exciting. There is a surprising lack of truly terrifying horror in modern theatre and, admittedly, much of that must be attributed to the progression of culture and technology, however, the stage still has the potential to host terrifying experiences. Cinematic horror would not exist without the rich and bloody history of theatrical horror and, while I am

not yet sure how truly scary *When My Body Cried Out* is, it has the potential to be, through the *Guignol* aesthetics and the engaging story. By slowly reintroducing the possibility of terrifying work and inspiring those who are interested in theatrical horror, *Grand Guignol* can still be used to revive gore and terror in theatre and breed a new generation of terrifying productions.

Codifying modern horror as a whole involves actively researching the history of horror and its basis in literature dating back to the Gothic tradition. In his article, “Aesthetic Gothic Literature,” Rictor Norton details the strategic use of gore as not only shocking pieces to inspire fear, but as literary devices to strengthen a narrative (31). Fear has been a powerful motivator for me, personally. I grew up in a stable household peppered with momentary glimpses of true horror, short bursts of pure fear, which had a definitive impact on who I am today. I believe it is supremely important to learn through fear; it is a carnal, base instinct that has to be accessed or explored--abandoning it would neutralize such a wonderful, animalistic part of the human psyche that has been absolutely vital to our survival as a species. That being said, I am also very wary of putting out a script such as *When My Body Cried Out* into the world and am, at this point, still unsure if I ever want it staged. It is difficult to reconcile the part of me that believes so fervently in the power of fear and the importance of facing the ugly things in the world with the part of me that realizes how scary real life can be and how unnecessary horror movies or theatrical horror can be in comparison.

It is my hope that the cathartic nature of the script, in conjunction with the *Guignol* aesthetics and functionality, can work to combat apathy. When surrounded by terrible news in every way, people become desensitized to horror and loses its ability to fear. By reminding the body and mind what it fears, especially by putting a fictional, but relatable stage family through

horrific events in an intimate space, the voyeuristic audience is able to purge themselves of ill will and the grotesque lurking within, making room for empathy to grow and take hold.

WHEN MY BODY CRIED OUT

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*warnings: rape, gore, self-harm.

Character List.

Martha White. Late twenties.

Gabriel White. Mid-twenties. Brother and primary caretaker of Martha. A teacher, devoted husband and father.

Carol Foster White. Mid-twenties. Wife to Gabriel and doting, protective mother.

Doctor Glenn Congrieve. Middle-aged doctor and family friend.

Veronica Foster. Carol's sister. Late twenties, a budding lawyer.

ZERO. Martha's friend, a monstrous figment.

Setting: Kalamazoo, Michigan, USA. September 1962.

Setting

The stage is split in half with a clear division between two rooms. On one side is a stark white, sterile room with a thin mattress sitting on an iron bed frame: the Patient's Room. In this room is a frail woman with dark features, dressed in paper-thin hospital garments and huddled in a corner. Behind the woman is a tall, horrific figure, ZERO. The other room is a kitchen with a circular dining table in the center. The home seems well-lived in and has been in the family for a few generations. The rooms alternate between dim and full lighting, so that all life is visible.

Scene One

LIGHTS UP on the Kitchen with GABRIEL, visibly exhausted, seated at the table, grading papers. He fidgets with a lighter. It is late in the evening.

GABRIEL

Damn.

GABRIEL sits back and groans, rubbing his eyes fervently. He lights a cigarette finally and takes a long drag. CAROL ENTERS. She seems equally exhausted, moving to the sink to pour herself a cup of water. GABRIEL watches her fondly as she leans against the sink, drinking quietly.

GABRIEL

You're so beautiful.

CAROL

Your daughter thought it would be funny to give all of her stuffed animals pretty pink lips with Mommy's brand new Max Factor lipstick.

GABRIEL

I bet they don't look as good as you.

CAROL

I am covered in spit-up.

GABRIEL

Mm, my favorite.

CAROL

Today, she picked up an earthworm and asked where its brain was and I tried to explain to her that earthworms don't really have brains in the first place and she was absolutely inconsolable.

Crying! Sobbing! With this—this earthworm in her hand, still wriggling around.

There is a comfortable silence as CAROL sighs frustratedly before GABRIEL speaks up.

GABRIEL

She gets that from your side of the family.

CAROL laughs before crossing to GABRIEL. She clears her throat and scratches her chest, holding her mug close to her heart.

CAROL

How was your day?

GABRIEL

Fine. The kids had fun summers. Listen to this one:

GABRIEL places his cigarette in an ashtray and reads from one of the papers sitting in front of him. While CAROL listens, she begins to gently rub her collarbones, as if uncomfortable.

GABRIEL (CONT.)

"I went to my family's house on Lake Michigan. It was warm. It was windy, so the sand kept getting into my eyes. Even though it was summer, the water was cold, but we went swimming a lot.

I—"

CAROL

Sorry, honey. Did you happen to pick up any more sulfur powder from Doctor Congrieve on your way home?

GABRIEL

Oh, yeah I did. Sorry. Is it still bothering you?

CAROL

Yeah. It was getting better for a while and it's just starting to look worse, now.

GABRIEL rises from the table and crosses to the refrigerator, pulling out a container with white

powder. CAROL unbuttons the first few buttons on her shirt and reveals long scratch marks on her collarbones and chest that are now mildly infected. They look visibly sore, garishly red and covered in puss. GABRIEL mixes some of the powder with water to make a paste.

CAROL

There should be some gauze in the high-up cabinet.

GABRIEL crosses to CAROL.

GABRIEL

Oh yeah, that's not looking good. Maybe you should go visit Glenn soon to get this checked out. Get Veronica to watch Alice for a morning. This is gonna' sting.

CAROL flinches and hisses as GABRIEL begins spreading the paste over her skin and dressing the infected wounds.

GABRIEL

Sorry, baby. You can thank Doctor Glenn Congrieve if you have any complaints about how I treat patients.

CAROL shudders, making a face at the name.

CAROL

That man creeps me out, sometimes. He's so serious.

GABRIEL

Oh, yeah. Even working with him while I was in high school, it was all business. He taught me a lot, though.

CAROL makes a noise of acknowledgement, trying to split her focus between the pain of the wounds and Gabriel's talking.

GABRIEL

But he's all the family Martha and I have left. And he gives us free medical samples to help with boo-boos.

CAROL

I know. Still.

Pause. CAROL grins.

CAROL

Boo-boos?

GABRIEL

I mean—I know this isn't just some boo-boo. And I'm sorry this happened to you, I should have been there to stop it.

She doesn't know what she's doing. She's—

CAROL

Sick. She's sick. I know. I was only teasing you.

It's alright, for the millionth time, you don't have to apologize. It's my fault. I shouldn't have tried to touch her.

I'm just—I'm glad it was me this time.

GABRIEL

Glenn told me she was getting better. He said she should have been able to handle visitors. I should have never let you near her. Least of all Alice.

GABRIEL pulls back and studies his handy work. CAROL nods before buttoning her shirt again, sighing with the almost immediate relief the powder has on her sores. GABRIEL rises to put the supplies away.

CAROL

Thank you. That feels so much better. Alice, I love her and I know she doesn't know what she's doing, but sometimes when I pick her up she'll just slap her palm against my chest and it's just so sore. Thank God she's not breastfeeding anymore. Okay, sorry. Tell me about the student and Lake Michigan, again?

GABRIEL

No, no. It's nothing. Don't worry about it.

CAROL

Honey--

GABRIEL

Sorry, I just. I can't concentrate anymore.

Pause.

GABRIEL (CONT.)

I'm tired of her hurting people. That isn't who she is. That's not my sister and I hate how I just—I hate her sometimes. I'm tired of the stares I get while I'm trying to buy milk at the market, I'm tired of the other teachers whispering, I'm tired of being the scary house on the block. I don't want Alice growing up with this shadow overhead. Once, when I was maybe sixteen, Martha went to the sanitarium for the first time. The bullying was relentless. I thought at the time that it didn't matter, as long as Martha didn't notice. And it seemed like she didn't. I tried to make myself feel better by thinking that she was fine. Maybe it worked on the surface, but there was always something inside of me that resented her so much. I don't think I ever grew out of that big, ugly shadow she cast over my life and I'm tired of it. I'm tired of hating her. She's my sister.

CAROL

I know how much you love and care about her, but maybe it would be better if we move her to a more adequate care facility. Put my feelings about her aside, it just seems better to put her in more capable hands. Her case is so extreme. Even Doctor Congrieve said that she may thrive more if she's sent away. Possibly even out of state, where they know how to treat her illness.

GABRIEL

I can barely afford Doctor Congrieve and he practically helped raise us. He's helping us out financially as best as he can. I can barely afford Kalamazoo Psychiatric Hospital, how am I supposed to move her anywhere else?

CAROL

I just think that, for Alice's sake, we should--

GABRIEL

Please do not—I can't deal with a fight over this tonight.
Please?

CAROL

I'm not trying to fight with you. I'm done fighting with you on this, you won. I'm just trying to talk to you. She's tied to my life, too and I think we should start thinking about our options.

GABRIEL

So you want to just ship her away? Why? Is she just a burden, now? Because she scratched you?

CAROL

This isn't just about that. You know it's not.

GABRIEL

Goddamn it. I thought you'd forgiven her for what she did, already. What more do you want from her? She can't help herself.

CAROL

And I'm sorry, is this just a scratch to you now?

GABRIEL

No, it's not, but ever since she accidentally snapped at you, you have been really pushing the subject of moving her farther and farther away and I don't like that.

CAROL

She was lunging for Alice.

GABRIEL

I-I know that, but she's--

CAROL

Sick! I know she's sick! But that doesn't make it okay, Gabriel! What if she hurts Alice?

GABRIEL

She won't. Carol-

CAROL

Alice was in the car that day! She's already tried once to kill her and now-

GABRIEL

Enough!

GABRIEL slams his fist on the table.

GABRIEL (CONT.)

I'm exhausted and I don't want to fight about this. Alice doesn't need to visit Martha, not until she's better.

CAROL

She's not getting better.

GABRIEL

I said that's enough.

CAROL

Oh, right. Because it doesn't exist if we don't talk about it. Meanwhile the other mothers on the block look like they're in physical pain when I ask if they'd like to get together for playdates. As if it's Alice's fault her Aunt is the boogeyman. But that's just a coincidence. I'm sure they're the crazy ones around here, right?

*CAROL EXITS, leaving her mug on the table.
GABRIEL sits, staring at the cup for a few moments, seemingly completely numb. After silence has settled, GABRIEL roars and violently seizes the mug, slinging it into the wall, the ceramic shattering and clattering to the ground. He places his head in his hands.*

LIGHTS DOWN.

Scene Two

LIGHTS UP on the Patient's Room. The Kitchen is empty. The room is silent for a few long, uncomfortable moments. MARTHA is crouched in a corner, humming a tune and picking at her fingers. On the Kitchen side of the stage, under dim lights, GABRIEL cleans the mess.

MARTHA

We drive. We drive and drive. I sit and the trees whisper when they pass. We drive. And we drive.

Suddenly, a bright, scarlet envelope slips under MARTHA's cell door. MARTHA scurries from her place in the corner to the red envelope and gathers it into her arms. She smells it, reveling in the smell of a memory she can no longer fully recollect, but is still very much comforted by. She opens it carefully, meticulously, as if damaging the envelope would permanently and irreversibly destroy her entire world. ZERO, standing in the corner, recites the letter aloud as MARTHA reads on the floor of her room.

ZERO

Dearest Martha. Hello. The high council is still deliberating on your case. It is not good that you attacked your brother's wife. Not good at all.

MARTHA

No, no, no. You don't understand.

ZERO

I understand that you have been very well-behaved otherwise and I appreciate that very much. The world beyond your walls is as it ever was; bleak and purposeless. The fighting is endless. You should be comforted by your safety.

MARTHA

Yes, yes. Safe.

ZERO

I am comforted, knowing that in this lonely, disgusting world,
I have you to read my words. My journey is long and tiresome,
but I rejoice in knowing you are waiting for me. Ever yours,
Thirty-Two.

*MARTHA sits for a while, reading the words over
and over before clutching the letter to her
chest. After a moment, she crawls to her bed and
takes out a small shoebox from underneath her
mattress and opens it to reveal a small
collection of scarlet envelopes. She carefully
places her newest addition in the box before
sliding it under her bed and returning to her
corner, picking at her fingers.*

MARTHA

Do you hear that, Zero? Thirty-Two is coming for me. My friend.

ZERO

I am your only friend.

MARTHA

That's not true. No. Gabriel is my friend. And Thirty-Two. And
Alice. Pretty Alice.

ZERO laughs. Horribly.

MARTHA

We drive. We drive and drive. I sit and the trees whisper when
they pass. We drive. We drive.

LIGHTS DOWN.

Scene Three

LIGHTS UP on the Kitchen. GABRIEL is seated at the round table, passing time. DOCTOR CONGRIEVE ENTERS after a few moments and GABRIEL stands to greet him, but the DOCTOR bypasses him in favor of the liquor cabinet.

GABRIEL

Hi, Glenn. Thank you for visiting, I really appreciate you coming in and keeping us up to date. Carol is out Christmas shopping and Alice is napping upstairs, I can't bring her to the hospital. I—

DOCTOR CONGRIEVE

We are going to be changing Martha's medication. She's becoming more and more violent during my visits and I am afraid she will return to harming herself. Shame. She was making great progress.

GABRIEL

Oh. That's—that's good. How—um—how much will it cost?

DOCTOR CONGRIEVE

It will be about a two-hundred-dollar increase on prescription medicine costs along with her bi-weekly check-ups.

GABRIEL sits.

GABRIEL

I can't- We can't afford that. Not while I'm teaching at the school.

DOCTOR CONGRIEVE

Come back and work at the hospital.

GABRIEL

No.

DOCTOR CONGRIEVE

Why not? You wouldn't have to worry about Martha's medical bills and you could have her moved to a more adequate facility.

GABRIEL

What's wrong with where she is now?

DOCTOR CONGRIEVE

Would you really like to get into that? Right now?

Pause.

DOCTOR CONGRIEVE

Even as a kid, you were one of my best staff members.

GABRIEL

I can't, Glenn. I have a family. Alice is starting preschool soon and I can be close to her working as a teacher. I like working with the kids.

DOCTOR CONGRIEVE

We have a pediatric ward.

GABRIEL

You are unbelievable. That place—I hate that place. It sucks away happiness. If I hadn't left that place, I know I wouldn't be with Carol right now and damn it if she isn't the best thing that's ever happened to me.

DOCTOR CONGRIEVE

The nurses still talk about you.

GABRIEL

That's nice.

Pause.

GABRIEL (CONT.)

I can't go back there. I still have nightmares, Glenn. I still hear them in my head, screaming. My arm hurts sometimes, like they're grabbing me and they won't let go. It feels like I'm the crazy one. I wake up in a cold sweat and

it feels like they—it feels like *she* is standing right over my bed, watching me sleep.

DOCTOR CONGRIEVE

We can put you in a quieter part of the hospital.

GABRIEL

I can't, Glenn. Thank you for the offer, but I can't. I'm an angrier person when I'm around that place.

DOCTOR CONGRIEVE

Alright. Please seriously consider coming back to work with us.

Your work experience is highly valuable and the patients genuinely loved you. All I am saying is that you could earn close to double what you earn as a teacher and you wouldn't have to worry about Martha as much, despite all the other complications.

GABRIEL

Martha. Do you think she's happy?

DOCTOR CONGRIEVE

That's impossible to say. She's safer, that's for sure. She is completely isolated and survives on a well-balanced diet. Besides attacking your wife, I will say that she's showing some improvement. She hasn't harmed herself too badly since she moved from her last room.

GABRIEL

Windows make her uncomfortable.

DOCTOR CONGRIEVE

She often isn't coherent enough to talk to me directly, but she has told me she likes her new room. Feels like home, she says.

GABRIEL

That's—that's good.

DOCTOR CONGRIEVE

I have patented a new version of the ECT. I can bring it in, have Martha be its first patient.

GABRIEL

Electro-

DOCTOR CONGRIEVE

Electroconvulsive Therapy, yes.

GABRIEL

I don't know. It didn't seem to work when we were younger.

DOCTOR CONGRIEVE

New machine, new results.

GABRIEL

Won't that be expensive?

DOCTOR CONGRIEVE

I'll do it pro-bono. For you.

GABRIEL

Really? Glen- You already do so much for us, I can't ask you to do that for her.

DOCTOR CONGRIEVE

It'd be my pleasure.

GABRIEL

Thank you, Glen. That's really incredible, I- thank you.

DOCTOR CONGRIEVE

Mm. Your mother would be very happy with how well you care for her. It's not easy, having a responsibility like that.

GABRIEL

She's my sister. What else am I supposed to do? Mom wouldn't be angry with her. Not even after the crash.

DOCTOR CONGRIEVE

Your sister is sick. She has been for a long time.

GABRIEL

Carol blames her for the accident.

DOCTOR CONGRIEVE

Most people do, Gabriel.

GABRIEL

It's not her fault. I remember when we were kids, she used to get so beat up. She used to sneak out of the house and go crawling through the woods in the middle of the night, and she'd come back in the morning, beaming. Even while bleeding and covered in burrs and rashes. Dad would get so angry at her for scratching her arm up, but she seemed happier when she bled. Zero told her to, she'd say. I was terrified of her. I am. I am terrified of her.

DOCTOR CONGRIEVE

That's perfectly natural.

GABRIEL

To be terrified of your own sister?

DOCTOR CONGRIEVE

To be terrified of monsters.

LIGHTS DOWN.

Scene Four

LIGHTS UP on the Patient's Room. MARTHA sits in the corner, picking at her fingers. The door to her room opens and a woman in a nurse's outfit steps in. She is wearing a mask with a smiling face on it. MARTHA does not notice. She walks in and faces the audience. It looks like she says something, but there is only silence. She picks up a dirty food tray from the floor and walks out. Once she is gone, MARTHA looks up suddenly and rises quickly, pacing rapidly. She is wild with sudden thought, frantic as she speaks.

MARTHA

It doesn't make sense! No sense, no sense! No letter, no sense. He doesn't know what he is doing. ZERO, it makes no sense!

Pause. Suddenly MARTHA looks directly at the audience and appears somewhat lucid.

MARTHA

They called me. Changeling. I didn't cry when I was born.

ZERO shifts suddenly, moving similarly to a marionette with stiff joints, each successive shift in posture unnatural and unexpected.

MARTHA (CONT.)

My mother has forgotten me, the Changeling. Mother? There are angels inside of me, crying out for freedom, but shh, shh, I cannot let them go. Not yet. I miss my friends. Zero is the only one who has stayed. I miss Twenty, the dog. He was a good boy. And Sixteen! Oh, that playful sixteen. What a lovely girl.

As she continues, ZERO seems to control her. MARTHA's movements, careful and normal as they are, reflect ZERO's jagged and sudden gestures.

MARTHA (CONT.)

I used to go out into the woods with all my friends and we would dance and for once in my life, it felt like my skin was not so tight it was strangling me. The trees would whisper to me that I was home, the stars would shine only for me. Only for me.

As MARTHA speaks, she begins to retreat into herself. Just before she is able to escape into herself, another red letter slips under the door and she scrambles for it. When she returns to standing, ZERO takes her into his arms, his mouth on her skin as he speaks.

ZERO

My dearest, dearest Martha. Soon, we will both be free. I hope you are well, I hope you are comfortable.

ZERO begins to snake an ugly hand up under MARTHA's dress. She stares blankly ahead.

ZERO (cont.)

I want you to know that I understand you, my Martha. It is not your fault that the world around you cannot see how truly beautiful you are.

MARTHA

I have been dirtied.

ZERO

You are the endless night sky, the everlasting.

MARTHA

I am the universe, ever expanding.

ZERO

Keep hope, dearest. Continue to heal. Yours, Thirty-Two.

MARTHA

I sit and the trees whisper when they pass. We drive. We
drive.

*MARTHA turns her head and ZERO takes her mouth
with his, the kiss violent and cruel. She falls
limp in his arms. He opens his mouth in a
disgusting smile and black liquid pours from it.*

LIGHTS DOWN.

Scene Five

LIGHTS UP on the Kitchen. CAROL and VERONICA sit across from each other. They look out the window and watch ALICE playing. In the Patient's Room, MARTHA has been strapped to her bed and is connected to various wires leading outside her room door via an old, metal helmet. CAROL smiles.

CAROL

She's so smart, Veronica. And she has such an amazing imagination. Yesterday, while she was eating her afternoon snack, she looked up at me and said, so clearly, "Mommy! The bluebirds are talking to each other! They're saying 'I love you!'" It was the cutest thing.

VERONICA

My niece is pretty great. She gets all her smarts from me, obviously.

CAROL

I'm so excited for her to start preschool. She's going to learn so much. And it'll be nice to have some extra time around the house again.

VERONICA

Oh, so you've chosen a place?

CAROL

Yes, about a ten-minute drive down Oakland Drive. It's a cute little place and-

VERONICA

I thought you were moving away.

CAROL

Oh. That's not happening any time soon.

VERONICA

What? Why not?

CAROL

It's not the right time. Gabriel isn't ready to move his sister anywhere.

VERONICA

His sister can stay in Kalamazoo, you two can't. You're drowning in debt, so much so that you can't even afford to repair that broken window at the back. Yes, I noticed, and so does everyone else.

CAROL

It's his parents' house.

VERONICA

You're pregnant.

CAROL places a hand on her abdomen, but does not say anything.

VERONICA

You can't afford another child.

CAROL

What can I do?

VERONICA

Leave. Or get rid of it.

CAROL

Veronica!

VERONICA

It's an option, you know a doctor! God, stop being a goddamn pushover Carol! When are you going to tell him?

CAROL

I don't want to stress him out. He has a lot on his mind right now.

The lights begin to flicker. MARTHA writhes on her bed. VERONICA gestures to the lights.

VERONICA (CONT.)

Really, Carol? What's next?

CAROL looks incredibly uncomfortable.

CAROL

No, it's not that. It's-

VERONICA (CONT.)

Do you smell that? Is something burning?

CAROL

Oh, God!

CAROL EXITS, running out of the Kitchen. VERONICA sits for a few moments alone as footsteps are heard running downstairs, to the basement. The lights return to normal and CAROL re-ENTERS the Kitchen. MARTHA falls lax in her bed. During the scene, CONGRIEVE ENTERS the Patient's Room and writes a few notes on his clipboard. He unhooks her from the helmet and undoes the restraints on MARTHA's limp body. HE EXITS with the helmet under his arm.

CAROL

It's just- the breaker box. Sometimes it short-circuits and starts to smell kinda funny. Gabriel's going to fix it, he's just going through a lot.

VERONICA

I don't give a damn what he's going through. That's not normal. If I had known you were going to marry into an insane family, I would have packed you into my suitcase and taken you to college with me.

CAROL

I'm tired of fighting with him. He cares about his sister and I love him for that. I just wish he cared as much for his family. His child.

VERONICA

Exactly. What about Alice? You are trying to raise her on a single teacher's salary in a house you can't afford with another on the way? When his mom died, she didn't exactly leave you two with a huge amount of assets. This house is a huge loss. You're trying to keep a sinking ship afloat with duct tape and prayers, here.

CAROL

I don't know what to do.

VERONICA

The only saving grace this place has is the massive insurance policy on it, but there's no way you can continue to pay for that. And not to mention the legal fees. I took your case on pro-bono, but I'm not the only one you two have to think about paying.

CAROL

I know, Veronica!

VERONICA

Then why aren't you doing anything about it?! What do you care that she's around your family, she killed her own mother and she almost killed your daughter, Carol!

GABRIEL's voice is heard from offstage.

GABRIEL (offstage)

There's my pretty girl! Did you miss Daddy?

CAROL

Veronica, please. Drop it.

GABRIEL ENTERS. He looks tired, but he smiles for the women.

GABRIEL

Hello, ladies.

CAROL

Hi, honey.

VERONICA hands GABRIEL a letter from in her purse.

GABRIEL

What's this?

VERONICA

You can read, can't you?

GABRIEL

From the insurance company?

VERONICA

Oh, good. He can read.

GABRIEL

They renewed our policy?

VERONICA

Yes. While your mother's life insurance policy was not worth very much, she and your father set up a very expensive deal to protect this house. Your policy is currently reactivated, now that your lawsuit has been closed. And no increases, thankfully.

GABRIEL

That's amazing!

VERONICA

How do you plan on paying the monthly bills?

GABRIEL

Excuse me?

CAROL

Veronica, please.

VERONICA

It's an honest question.

GABRIEL

It's none of your business.

VERONICA slings her purse on her shoulder and gets ready to leave.

VERONICA

When you can't get a handle on your expenses and begin to drag my sister down with you- to the point where she has to serve me lunch and not herself, because she's "not hungry," it becomes all my business.

VERONICA kisses CAROL goodbye before GABRIEL can compose himself enough to retort and EXITS.

Pause.

GABRIEL

Your sister is a goddamn nightmare.

CAROL

You're such a hypocrite.

GABRIEL

Come on, Carol. Really?

CAROL

She just saved your ass. She sorted out all the shit with the insurance company and kept your sister out of jail, all without charging us. We have to start thinking realistically!

GABRIEL

About what?!

CAROL

We can't continue to live here. It's just not possible. I can't work and raise Alice all at once and your salary at the school just isn't enough!

GABRIEL

So you want me to just uproot? My father built this house for his children and I'm not about to just sell it!

CAROL

Then what? What do we do?

GABRIEL

I'll think of something!

In the Patient's Room, MARTHA has regained some consciousness. ZERO jerks his head and she rolls off the bed. Gradually, she is able to sit on the floor and breathe. Gather herself.

CAROL

We've tried everything! We've tried cutting back on everything, if we do anything more, we'll starve. You can't pay for this house and for Martha all at once.

GABRIEL

I'm trying, Carol! Do you think I'm not trying?

CAROL

I know you're trying; I'm just saying that all of this isn't feasible. We need something else! I can get a job working nights, maybe, but-

GABRIEL

You can't do that. I need you here taking care of things.

CAROL

I'm so tired of this, Gabriel.

GABRIEL

Do you want me to just abandon everything?

CAROL

I want you to stop letting her control your life! Put her in a different institution if it'll put your mind at ease! I need you to be here, I need you to care about our family!

GABRIEL

She is my family.

CAROL

She killed what was left of your family.

GABRIEL

Don't you say that. It was an accident.

CAROL

No. No, Gabriel, it wasn't. I can't take this anymore. She was sitting in the passenger's seat, she freaked out, and she pulled the wheel.

In the patient's room, MARTHA looks up from sitting in the middle of the floor. Her face is dark and she speaks.

MARTHA

I sit and the trees whisper when they pass. They say to me-

MARTHA and ZERO (together)

Come home, Changeling. Your suffering can be over.

CAROL

With your daughter in the backseat.

GABRIEL

She's sick.

CAROL

She's a murderer. Your mother died because of her. Driving her to a doctor's appointment. Never mind that she attacked me a month ago, no, that we don't even consider anymore, right? Because she's *sick*? But who gives a shit about Carol, right?!

GABRIEL

She didn't mean to.

CAROL

She's fucking insane and if you keep putting her in front of this family, in front of our daughter, I will do what I have to to keep Alice safe from you.

Pause.

CAROL (CONT.)

Gabriel, I'm preg-

GABRIEL snaps.

GABRIEL

You can't take her away from me! You can't leave me! I fucking taking care of both of you and this is the thanks I get?! I work my ass off every day to try and provide and it's never fucking enough for you! You knew what you were marrying when you married me and now you're giving me these ultimatums that I can't choose between and you know I can't! You like playing mind games with me, just like everyone else, don't you?! You ungrateful cunt!

They look at each other for a moment before CAROL EXITS, in tears. She leaves GABRIEL standing alone. He goes to the liquor cabinet and takes a bottle for himself. He hears CAROL'S voice from offstage.

CAROL (offstage)

C'mon, baby. We're going to have a sleepover at Aunty Veronica's house tonight.

The door closes and he stands there for a few, uncomfortable, silent moments. Drinking from the glass. Suddenly, he punches the wall once, twice. He unleashes. When he can finally calm himself down, he moves, going to the telephone on the wall and he dials a number.

GABRIEL

Doctor Congrieve? It's Gabriel. Yes, sir. I want- I want to take the job at the hospital. Yes, sir. No. Nights. I can come in tomorrow afternoon. Thank you.

GABRIEL sits at the table after hanging up the phone.

GABRIEL (CONT.)

Fuck.

GABRIEL pulls out his lighter and begins fidgeting with it, flicking it on and off.

LIGHTS remain dim on the Patient's Room, but MARTHA responds as if she can hear her brother.

MARTHA

You're a lot like dad.

GABRIEL

That's not nice.

MARTHA

It's true.

GABRIEL

How?

MARTHA

You like the same drinks. One second you're angry, the other you're not. You're afraid. You don't see yourself in your daughter.

GABRIEL

That's not true.

MARTHA

You never felt like she was yours. Even when she was born.

GABRIEL

Don't say that.

MARTHA

She's like me. The trees would have taken her, too. We could have been free. Together.

GABRIEL

I'm sorry you feel trapped. I'm sorry we had to do this to you.

MARTHA

The angels are so small, they crawl beneath my skin. I need to let them free.

GABRIEL

Why can't you just get better?

At the same moment GABRIEL puts the bottle to his lips, MARTHA scrambles, trying desperately to brush something off of her that no one but her can see. She sobs.

LIGHTS DOWN

Scene Six

LIGHTS UP on the Patient's Room. MARTHA is standing in the middle of her room, looking out. She looks visibly distressed and exceptionally wild, like an animal. Caged too long. ZERO stands in the corner.

MARTHA

I was saving us all. The trees called to me and told me we could all be safe: me, mama, and Alice. The fragments are coming, scraping and scratching. They're coming. They're always coming.

The door to her cell opens and DOCTOR CONGRIEVE ENTERS, putting on latex gloves.

DOCTOR CONGRIEVE

Hello, Martha. How are we feeling today?

MARTHA

I am alright. Thank you for asking.

DOCTOR CONGRIEVE

Good. I appreciate you talking to me. I'm going to check your heartbeat now, alright?

MARTHA

That's alright.

DOCTOR CONGRIEVE walks behind her, looming. He lifts her dress and presses his stethoscope to her back.

DOCTOR CONGRIEVE

Breathe.

MARTHA

Do you have any letters for me today?

DOCTOR CONGRIEVE

Letters?

MARTHA

Never mind.

DOCTOR CONGRIEVE

Yes, never mind.

MARTHA

Can I go outside today, Doctor?

DOCTOR CONGRIEVE

I don't think so. Not today. Perhaps another time, darling.
Unless...

MARTHA

Yes?

DOCTOR CONGRIEVE

Maybe if you win today's game, you can go outside.

MARTHA

Really?

DOCTOR CONGRIEVE

Yes.

PAUSE.

MARTHA

Okay.

DOCTOR CONGRIEVE

Good girl.

CONGRIEVE snakes his arm around her and begins kissing her neck. He slips his hand under her dress as he moves around her. ZERO, standing in the corner, moves again in rapid, jagged

movements along the back wall. MARTHA is choking back sobs as he goes on.

MARTHA

Where is Gabriel?

MARTHA cries out as CONGRIEVE pinches something, hard.

DOCTOR CONGRIEVE

Not here. Be quiet.

CONGRIEVE touches her further, his hand reaching to her front and groping. He moves his hips against her. MARTHA begins to sing a children's song.

DOCTOR CONGRIEVE

Good girl.

CONGRIEVE continues to touch her. He suddenly touches somewhere sensitive and she lets out a sob.

DOCTOR CONGRIEVE

No burn marks. Patient is responding well to Electroconvulsion.
Good.

He finishes. She cries as he lets her go, unraveling from around her. ZERO stands in the corner again, watching.

DOCTOR CONGRIEVE

God, yes.

CONGRIEVE gathers himself, putting his hair back into place as Martha turns up to look at him. He walks towards the door and she follows.

MARTHA

I'm excited to see the trees.

DOCTOR CONGRIEVE

You're not going outside.

MARTHA

What?

DOCTOR CONGRIEVE

Well, you cried. You lost. You can't go outside.

MARTHA

Please. Please, the angels. The trees. Please.

DOCTOR CONGRIEVE

Maybe next time.

MARTHA

Please?!

DOCTOR CONGRIEVE

Good-bye Martha.

MARTHA

No, don't! You said I could go outside!

MARTHA grabs his arm and pulls him back. CONGRIEVE turns and slaps her. Hard. There is a quick moment of quiet as MARTHA holds her face. She screams and reaches out for CONGRIEVE's neck. She grabs hold and tears, ripping it out as blood sprays wildly over her and over the room. As he falls and fights to survive, MARTHA continues to claw at his chest until he's completely limp. Finally, she steps away, hyperventilating until she's sitting on her bed. She cries.

LIGHTS DOWN

Scene Seven

LIGHTS are dim on both the Kitchen and the Patient's Room. In the transition, MARTHA presses herself up against ZERO and sobs. ZERO holds her tight. GABRIEL comes in through the door and sees the body. He drags it out, shutting the door behind him.

LIGHTS UP on the Kitchen. GABRIEL enters, pacing wildly and fidgeting with his lighter. There are some blood stains on his scrubs.

GABRIEL

Shit, shit shit shit!

CAROL ENTERS, running in. GABRIEL rushes towards her, hugging her tight to his body.

CAROL

Oh, my god Gabriel.

GABRIEL

Thank you for coming home.

CAROL

I left as soon as you called. What happened?

GABRIEL

I went to check on her and. And I found her on her bed, blood all over. And Doctor Congrieve just-

CAROL

Oh, my god!

GABRIEL sits at the kitchen table and drops his head into his hands.

GABRIEL

There was so much blood, it's everywhere. Carol-

CAROL

What did you do with his-

GABRIEL

Please don't.

CAROL

Oh, Gabriel.

GABRIEL

She can't afford another trial. *We* can't afford another trial.
I couldn't call the cops I didn't know what to do. So I. I
just.

PAUSE.

GABRIEL (CONT.)

We can't stay here.

CAROL

What do you mean?

GABRIEL

We have to leave. As soon as possible.

CAROL

Do you mean it?

GABRIEL

Yes. I can't take this anymore. There is going to be an
investigation sooner or later and Jesus Christ, Carol. I- I
hid a body. That my sister tore apart. I can't go to jail. Not
with you and Alice to think about.

CAROL

Me, Alice, and the baby.

GABRIEL

What?

GABRIEL looks at her as she places a hand on her abdomen.

GABRIEL

Oh. Oh, Carol, really? Oh, honey.

They embrace.

GABRIEL

You should have told me sooner.

CAROL

I'm sorry. This is so awful, I can't believe you're finding out this way. We were going through so much. We kept fighting. The timing never seemed right. But now- now we can be happy. I feel like I can breathe again, I'm so relieved.

GABRIEL

Yeah.

CAROL

I'm proud of you. You're right, we need to leave. We can sell the house, we can make some money and start over.

GABRIEL

Don't worry about the house, honey. I'll take care of everything, I don't want you worrying anymore. You've done so much for me.

CAROL

What about- What about Martha?

GABRIEL

I'll handle it.

CAROL

Thank you. Thank you, honey.

GABRIEL

It's the right thing to do. We have to hurry.

CAROL

I love you. I don't know anyone who would have done as much as you have for your sister. But sometimes, you just have to let go. You protected your family.

GABRIEL

Thank you. I love you, too. We need to start packing.

CAROL

Tonight?

GABRIEL

Yes. Yes. Get whatever you can packed. We have to be gone by morning. The house is small, we should get most of it done. I don't- I don't want to waste any time in case-

CAROL

I understand. Alright.

CAROL stands and GABRIEL holds her hand gently. He pulls her down for a kiss and she happily obliges. GABRIEL takes a moment, pressing his forehead to her abdomen before letting her go. CAROL EXITS. GABRIEL takes a moment, flicking his lighter nervously. He EXITS.

LIGHTS DOWN.

Scene Eight

LIGHTS UP on the Patient's Room. MARTHA is still sitting on her bed, silent. ZERO stands in his usual place. It is deathly quiet.

Suddenly, a red envelope slips under the door. MARTHA rushes for it, whispering incoherently as she tears it open. ZERO cocks his head behind her.

ZERO

Dearest Martha. My Dearest Martha. What have you done, my darling?

MARTHA

No, please.

ZERO

It cannot be helped. I must be brief. Freedom is near, my dearest. I will be there soon. The night sky is beautiful as I write, the stars are twinkling and the moon is ever-watchful. You will be free tomorrow, love. I am coming for you. It is alright, everything will be alright. Ever yours, Thirty-Two.

MARTHA lets the letter fall to the ground. Her face is twisted with elation and terror as she scrambles to her feet and looks out. As MARTHA looks out, in The Kitchen, CAROL and GABRIEL begin to quietly pack. GABRIEL carries a chest out onto the kitchen table.

MARTHA

Zero, I can hear them calling.

ZERO

Yes. Yes.

MARTHA

I'm frightened.

ZERO

Yes. Yes.

MARTHA

They're screaming from inside me, clawing their way out of me.
I feel them in my throat.

In the middle of their packing in the kitchen, GABRIEL grabs CAROL by the waist and she smiles as he pulls her in for a quick kiss. They smile at each other as CAROL kisses him again, more passionately. GABRIEL presses CAROL against the sink and they begin to move together.

MARTHA

I want to go to the lake in the Spring. The water is so beautiful. So cold. I would dive beneath the water, holding my breath and sink to the sand below. Even if the sun shone through and made everything clear, there was no warmth. Only the water, the shadow of the ice of winter barely melted away. I couldn't feel anything there. It was quiet, the fragments of myself alive and buzzing beneath my skin. I could have stayed there forever, the quiet death reaching out at me through the ripples above my head, begging me to take that single breath. To fill my lungs with the frigid tide and drown the angels inside of me.

GABRIEL and CAROL continue as ZERO approaches MARTHA. This time, he is rigid, his spine straight as he stands behind her.

MARTHA

Thirty-Two will take me to the lake.

ZERO reaches his arms around MARTHA and presses his claws to her chest.

MARTHA

They hurt. My heart hurts. The angels are gripping it and holding it too hard. Please, please, let go. Let go!

MARTHA places her hands over ZERO's, clutching at her own chest.

MARTHA

Let go!

MARTHA and ZERO tear at MARTHA's chest and it splits open, pouring blood all over her and the stage. She screams, the pain of it overwhelming as she grips at flesh and tears it from her body, bones beginning to show as she rips herself apart. ZERO stands behind her, claws up, dripping her blood. In The Kitchen, GABRIEL and CAROL reach a silent climax and kiss passionately. MARTHA screams.

LIGHTS OUT.

Scene Nine

LIGHTS UP on the Patient's Room, the Kitchen remains completely dark. MARTHA sits in the room, completely unharmed, everything back to normal. She is humming quietly to herself. For the first time, ZERO is not there with her. She is alone.

After a few moments of silence, the door to her room opens and a light pours inside, blinding and unlike any time her door has been opened. She waits, looking out for a visitor, but no one comes. Her door remains open as she looks out. Carefully, she gets up from her bed, cautiously moving until she's at the door. MARTHA EXITS.

MARTHA travels up a few stairs, indicated as the director sees fit. She leaves her room in the basement of the house for the first and final time.

LIGHTS UP on the Kitchen as MARTHA slowly ENTERS through the door. The room has been completely ripped apart, the cupboards are empty and the room is bare, save for the table sitting in the middle of the room as always with a large chest on top of it.

MARTHA looks around, stumbling through the room on coltish legs as something inside of her begins to recognize her surroundings, exploring it as smoke begins to gather at her feet.

Finally, she approaches the chest on the kitchen table. She fiddles with it a bit as the lights change to a flashing crimson and orange. A housefire. She coughs, but seems unperturbed, determined. Finally, she opens the chest and her eyes widen. She drops it on the table and it spills out hundreds of empty scarlet envelopes.

She begins to hyperventilate, holding her head and looking around the room until she recognizes her own kitchen, bare. She finally goes completely silent. She looks out into the audience as the house fire grows, pointing at them with a snarl as her hair falls wildly in her face.

LIGHTS FADE to black.

LIGHTS UP suddenly as she lets out a blood-curdling scream and charges the audience in a wild tangle of limbs and animalistic horror. Just before she reaches the first row of audience members, BLACKOUT.

CURTAIN.

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